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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UNDP PLANS IN THE NIGER DELTA

REF: Lagos 0060

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A United Nations (UN) official outlined a four part development program in the Niger Delta to be implemented in partnership with Shell Petroleum Development Company. He decried the lack of a concerted international plan to address ongoing unrest in the region. The UN continues to operate in most parts of the Delta under "normal" security precautions and wants to open an office in Port Harcourt.

Delta Assessment is Grim,
Lack of Coordination Decried

¶2. (SBU) During a round of introductory meetings with host country and international organization officials in Abuja, ECONOFFS met with Turhan Saleh, the Country Director for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Nigeria. Saleh started the discussion by decrying the lack of international coordination on development activities in the Delta. While acknowledging the good work of US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UK's Department of International Development (DFID), he said most development activities failed to fit into any broad plan for the region or engage in any coordinated way with Nigeria's federal government. He urged more international cooperation and planning on development activities.

¶3. (SBU) Saleh said the UNDP's assessment of the situation in the Delta was grim. He later shared a copy of a restricted UNDP report written prior to the April 2007 Nigerian national elections, which outlined projections for best case, medium case, and worst case scenarios post-election. The medium and worst cases, deemed most likely to occur, predicted increasing violence in the region with no movement towards a solution. However the worst case's most dire predictions of severe instability and oil production falling to 300,000 bpd have so far failed to materialize.

Shell Funds UNDP Initiative in the Delta

¶4. (SBU) Saleh described a MOU the UNDP has signed with Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) to fund and manage a Niger Delta development program in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states. SPDC will contribute \$14 million of the program's \$18 million budget with an additional \$10 million contribution for an environmental damage assessment project.

¶5. (SBU) The development program consists of four parts. One part

is a local governance improvement program designed to strengthen the capacity of local leaders and governments and to improve transparency. Activities include financing a local development fund to be used by Local Government Areas in small development projects, the creation and implementation of coherent local budget and planning procedures and facilitating local dialogue. Additionally, the UNDP program will create a knowledge base that can be used by local leaders in policy creation and implementation.

¶6. (SBU) Also envisioned is a youth empowerment and employment project. Planned are three vocational skills training centers that will combine technical skills training with HIV/AIDS counseling and courses on conflict resolution and leadership development.

¶7. (SBU) The largest, if most narrowly focused project, is an assessment of environmental conditions in the troubled Ogoniland, the tribal home of the Ogoni people and an area in Rivers state hit hard by oil spills, oil fires, and gas flaring. This is the most detailed portion of the four part development plan and will include overhead imagery, soil, water, and air sampling, a review of local fish stocks, a database of environmental conditions in the area, and technical recommendations on alleviating environmental damage. According to Saleh, the initial assessment is due in the third quarter of 2008. Ogoniland was the home to some SPDC operations until 1993, when production was shut-in due to severe unrest and intense local opposition. [Note: SPDC has estimated that Ogoniland could produce 28,000 bpd.] It was also the home of Ogoni activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed by the Nigerian government in ¶1995.

UN Personnel Free to Move in Most of Delta

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¶8. (SBU) Saleh went on to mention that the UN wishes to open an office in Port Harcourt to house the various UN organizations working in the Delta. The approximately fifty person staff would include not only locals, but expatriate UN employees. When asked about the impact of security restrictions on UNDP activities in the Delta region, Saleh responded that UN personnel are free to move about the region using what he termed, "normal security precautions," and that he had traveled to the Delta on numerous occasions. The only area considered out of bounds is Warri South. He did acknowledge that a review of the situation in Port Harcourt is possible in light of recent clashes between security forces and armed gangs.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: The discussion with Saleh was a welcome insight into UNDP activity in the region. Saleh appears eager to share information on ongoing projects and participate in closer international coordination on Niger Delta development and engagement with the Nigerian government. Our Ogoni contacts have expressed suspicion over the UNDP/SPDC cleanup project in Ogoniland because they were not consulted. We will continue to monitor the progress of the UNDP's efforts. End Comment.

McConnell